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ABSTRACT

Educational approaches to social work in the United States are compared with programs in South America. The first half of the document discusses a 1981 survey conducted by Argentine Professor Alayon. Questionnaires were sent to 236 schools in 21 Latin American countries. Data are based on 46 responses from 13 countries concerning status of the schools, history of the schools, enrollment statistics, faculty backgrounds, curriculum offerings, types of degrees offered, entrance requirements, graduation requirements, and field work placement. The second half of the document briefly compares undergraduate requirements of the Council on Social Work in the United States with the requirements of the Institute for Social Work in Buenos Aires. Major similarities can be found in American and South American programs, with exceptions lying in field work requirements and emphasis on research. The data indicate an improvement in the status of social work programs in Latin America and a trend toward more uniformity between the United States and Latin America in the training of social workers. (LH)

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A COMPARATIVE VIEW OF APPROACHES TO SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION IN ARGENTINA AND THE UNITED STATES

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Rough Draft

SP 014 892

Paper Presented at the Southwestern Social Science Association Meeting, Social Work Section, March 17, 1983, Houston, Texas.

The question may be raised: Why should American social work educators be concerned about or interested in social work training programs in Argentina, in South America or in other countries designated as underdeveloped? It is likely that those social workers who would raise such a question fail to appreciate how others view this country's knowledge of social work. There exists a dearth of literature on social work practice and education in South America which suggests we know little about what our colleagues are doing in other parts of this continent, particularly South America. These colleagues look to the United States for leadership. Many South American social workers received their training in the United States. Many of our text books are used in the 236 schools of social work found in twenty one coutries in Latin America. Some have been translated, others are used as is, since most schools require that students have a reading proficiency in English.

In our own country we are experiencing continual changes in our approaches to social work education. In the mid- 1970's we re-discovered and dignified undergraduate social work education, currently 330 of these programs are accredited (CSWE, 1983). Our MSW programs continue to grow, CSWE currently sets standards for 89 of these programs. Most programs offer the opportunity for students to obtain an MSW in five years for those graduates of accredited BSW programs. Doctoral programs are also on the increase, in 1982 the Council on Social Work Education listed 44 doctoral programs existing in 24 states. Despite our economic woes or possibly because of them we are likely to survive. The growth in number and kinds of social work programs has meant many changes which have raised old questions such as what do we teach at what level, how do we define specialization, and what constitutes generic practice. The profession is confronted with exciting challenges at a time of diminishing resources, i. e., funding problems, declining enrollments. Change is part of growth and our South American colleagues have also been experiencing changes in their approach to social work education. It is possible that we may find some answers to our own questions by examining the kinds of programs that have been developed in countries with fewer resources.

You will note that I am expanding the subject matter indicated in my title. I am acknowledging that I am unable to look at what has happened in Argentina without acknowledging development in other countries. Argentina has played a leadership role along with Chile, Brazil and Mexico in the evolvement of today's social work practice.

For purposes of this paper I will share the highlights of a 1981 survey conducted by Argentine Professor Norberto Alayon. He sent questionaires to 236 existing schools in 21 Latin-American countries. He asked questions that would yield characteristics of existing social work programs. He obtained 46 responses from 13 countries, two countries, Mexico and Brazil had the most numerous responses. Fourteen of 65 Mexican schools were included in the sample (30%), 13 of 58 Brazilian schools (28%) and the remainder were grouped as other Latin-American schools. The responses from Argentina were minimal, 4 of 43 schools responded to the questionaire and were thus included in the sample. Given the limitted number of responses we are unable to reach any conclusions, however, the data is helpful for our purposes. The patterns found are representative of patterns reported by other sources such as the World Guide to Social Work Education (1974).

Alayon's study examined the status of the schools, i.e. whether they were independent schools as oppossed to being attached to universities. He found that 65% of the 46 schools were attached to universities, 57% were supported by state funding. He was interested in examining the history of the schools i.e. how long they had been in existence. He found that that the majority, 37% were founded during the years, 1970 to 1979. Two schools have the distinction of being founded between 1920 and 1930. Chile established the first school of social work in 1925, Argentina founded theirs in 1930. An antecedent program was established in Buenos Aires in 1924 by the same medical faculty that founded the first school of social work, this was the program training women as Hygiene visitors to combat the problem of tuberculosis.

Alayon examined enrollment statistics, he found, not surprising that 98% of the students were women. In 1981, the schools reported an enrollment of 14,289 students in the 46 schools, 285 of these students or two percent were men. The question of who teaches these students was addressed. Traditionally, schools of social work in Latin America have been overly dependent on other disciplines. His findings indicate a trend to use more faculty with social work backgrounds, primarily on a part-time basis. Forty-five percent of the faculty used had social work backgrounds, 264 (64%) were on part-time, 154 (36%) were full-time. The fifty-five percent non-social work faculty used was primarily part-time, from the disciplines of sociology, psychology, anthropology, political science, economics, law and medicine.

The curriculum offerings were examined to see patterns that reveal how social work educators conceptualize the role of the social worker and the kinds of knowledge areas that are pertinent to his/her practice. Earlier writers on social work education in South America suggested that other disciplines dominated the direction and administration of social work programs so that students graduated knowing more about a related discipline such as law or medicine than the practice of social work. Alayon's study revealed that 63% of the course offerrings were in social work, 10 % in psychology, 10% in sociology, 7% in law, 3% in medicine, and 17% in other areas. The length of the programs was examined, earlier studies suggest that the length was two to three years of study in technical schools. The length of study indicates something about the expectations and demands placed on the students. The survey revealed a trend toward four year programs, fifty-five percent of the 46 schools required four years for completion, twenty-two percent required from four and one half to five and one half years duration, these were the programs offerring the licensed social worker title.

The kinds of degrees were examined. It was found that South American schools tend to offer titles rather than degrees. Alayon's study revealed that five types of titles are awarded, some schools offer more than one title. Thirteen (27%) offer the title of licensed social worker, N = 46, ten or twenty percent offer the title

of social worker, nine (18%) offer a bachelor's in social work, six (12%) offer the title of social worker and six (12%) offer the title of technician in social work.

The question of entrance requirements was addressed, thirty-two (70%) of the 46 schools require successful completion of secondary school, the equivalent of our high school. Thirty-four (74%) of the 46 schools require an entrance exam. The nature or content of the exam is not indicated. Fifteen schools (33% of those who responded, half did not) require a certificate of conduct, possibly this is in the form of reference letters.

The requirements for graduation were also addressed. The data suggests some variability related to the various titles awarded. More consistency was evident in the programs designed to award the five year or more program for the licensed social worker. Nine (69%) of the 13 schools that offer this title require a thesis, five (38%) require in addition an oral or comprehensive exam. The course content for the Licensing program indicates a macro-practice emphasis, course titles include: 1) Argentine Political Economics 2) Financial regimen of social services 3) urban and rural sociology 4) Planning and development of social services 5) Administration of public social services and 6) a research seminar.

The question of field work was addressed, the amount of time used for field work and the kind of setting used for student placements. The data revealed that thirty-four percent of the student's time is devoted to field instruction. The field faculty are in some instances reinbursed for their services as field instructors. A listing of agencies by number of students placed revealed that most students are placed in some form of government supported agency. It was found that 1,974 or 39% of 5,028 student placements reported were in government community development programs. Data was available on 31 of the 46 schools included in the survey. The second highest number of students, 699 (14%) were placed in health settings, primarily state health programs. The third highest number of students 580 (11%)

were placed in juvenile services which includes agencies dealing with children's services, both private and public. The fourth highest number of students 446 (9%) were placed in school settings, primarily public schools. Other field placement settings used included: 1) industry 2) social security 3) housing 4) corrections, 5) unions, 6) recreation and 7) rural worker government programs.

A typical four year program leading to the title of social worker at the Institute of Social Work, a private institution established in 1964 in Buenos Aires is as follows: First Year 1) Preventive Social Medicine 2) History and Philosophical Fundamentals of Social Work 3) Sociology 4) Statistics and Demography 5) Civil Law 6) Community Agencies 7) Psychology of Personality 8) Processal Law 9) Social Research and 10) Field work by observational visits; Second Year: 1) Social Group work 2) Social Psychology 3) Argentine Sociology 4) Social Casework 5) Human Growth 6) Field work in Social Casework; Third year: 1) Community Organization and Development 2) Mental Health and Psychopathology 3) Social Law and Social Legislation 4) Social Welfare Planning and Administration 5) Social economy and 6) Field work in social group work 7) Social Policy; Fourth Year: 1) Professional Ethics 2) Minor's Law (Junvenile) 3) Cultural Anthropology 4) Supervision 5) Field work in Community Organization and Development and 6) Specialization Seminars (Public Community Organization Projects, Medical Social Work, Teaching, Supervision, Aging, Industrial Social Work, Psychiatric Social Work, etc.) Field instruction required is as follows, a total of 192 hours is devoted to field work in the first year, 384 hours each in the second and third years, and 480 hours in the fourth year.

Discussion: The task of comparing educational approaches to social work in Argentina and the United States is complicated because of the limitations of the survey data and the various levels of social work preparation found in both countries. For puposes of comparison the

the Council on Social Work requirements for accreditation of undergraduate programs leading to a BA or BS degree in social work will be discussed. In the United States the social work curriculum is designed to offer social welfare content as part of the students' liberal arts education, to provide preparation for graduate training in social work, and to prepare students for beginning level social work practice. Undergraduate courses focus on human behavior and social interaction, the historical, philosophical and sociological basis of social welfare institutions and the social work profession and methods of intervention in social work practice. The course work for social work majors constitutes 28-32 credit hours and includes the following content: 1) Introduction to Social Service 2) Policy - Social Welfare as a Social Institution 3) Policy, Social Issues and Program Analysis 4) Individual and Family Behavior, 5) Group, Community and Organizational Behavior 6) Social work Practice: Values and Problem Analysis 7) Social Work Practice: Intervention and Evaluation, 8) Field Experience and Seminar I, 9) Field Experience and Seminar II, and 10) Dynamics of Race and Culture for Social Work Practice. Electives are available on methods and content related to fields of practice such as social work practice in schools, corrections, mental health and techniques of working with families and children etc.

Without direct experience, the content by course titles found at the Institute for Social Work in Buenos Aires seems to address similar content found in United States undergraduate programs with a heavier emphasis on social welfare dimensions of practice eg. social law and social legislation, social economy, Argentine Sociology The field requirements are more, 1440 clock hours compared to our average 500. We do not know how characteristic the Institute program is of other Argentine programs. We assume it is fairly typical given that it was identified by the Argentine Council of Schools of Social Work as a model to be included in the World Guide to Social Work Education.

In conclusion, the data reviewed indicates a trend toward more uniformity in the training of social workers in the United States and Latin America. It is evident that South American schools are improving their status within their countries, this is evident in the growing number of schools that are part of state universities. The length of education appears to be similar with the changing length of educational requirements in the United States and the predominant pattern in South America. If the BA or BS in social work is compared with the four year program leading to the title of social worker in Argentina. The advanced standing MSW programs appear to address similar content in the planning and adminstration concentration as that described for the Argentine Licensed social worker program. The United States MSW programs are different from South American programs in their research emphasis, a very limited number of American schools of social work require a thesis to obtain the MSW degree.

In regards to faculty, the data suggests Latin-American schools are moving away from a heavy reliance on use of non-social work faculty, however, there continues to be a heavy reliance on part-time faculty, both social work and that of other disciplines. This may also be true of some U. S. undergraduate programs. The use of part-time faculty has its advantages, it exposes students to faculty who have fresh direct practice experience. On the other hand it introduces vested interest conflict problems particularly when the part-time person has other responsibilities. Part-time faculty may not have time or be sufficiently knowledgeable to participate in curriculum development. A glance at the courses listed for the Institute of Social Work in Buenos Aires suggest there may be need to examine some of the content for possible duplication. Some faculties approach curriculum changes by adding courses. Of course, we are guilty of that too.

Alayon comments on the variability found in his survey of schools. He suggests that Latin-American social workers are experiencing an identity crisis, the role of the professional social worker remains unclear. He raises the question: Who is the social assistant assisting,

the poor or the status quo? Our social workers raise similar questions in this country. It is gratifying to see that social work education in Argentina and South America is alive and well.

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